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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000899

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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA AND CA/OCS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/20/2027

TAGS: [AMGT](#) [ASEC](#) [APER](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: APPALLINGLY BAD EXAMPLE OF UNAUTHORIZED PERSONAL
TRAVEL TO LEBANON

REF: 05 STATE 86463

Classified By: Jeffrey Feltman, Ambassador, per 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (U) We urge all recipients of this message to remind all employees that Embassy Beirut is a partially unaccompanied post. All USG employees from all agencies, as well as their families and members of households, are subject to reftel guidance on travel to Beirut. Unless advised differently by Washington, we understand that these rules apply as well to Personal Services Contractors (PSCs). As noted in para 14, "any personal travel to posts that are partially unaccompanied must be approved by M (the State Department's Under Secretary for Management in advance." While M clearance is frequently given for family reunification reasons in Beirut, far too often USG employees arrive in Beirut without going through this process. By defying the rules, these employees who show up without prior clearance are in violation of the Diplomatic Security Act (22 U.S.C. 4802), put themselves at risk, and potentially harm our political interests in Lebanon.

12. (SBU) We are currently dealing with an appallingly bad example of disregard of the rules for travel to partially unaccompanied posts. On 6/19, SGT Sean Buffalo, a Mississippi National Guardsman and a DOD GS-15 employee who reports that he now serves as a contractor for the Toifer Corporation in Afghanistan, showed up in Beirut for a three-day visit, reportedly to see his fiancée. He was detained at the Rafic Hariri Beirut International Airport for violating Lebanese customs. In his luggage, he carried a Red Dot Scopes, a Bi-Pod, an AR-15 Rail, a Picatilly Rail with Laser Sight, and a GPS. Although our DATT used his channels to obtain Lebanese tacit approval to simply allow Buffalo to depart Lebanon quietly on the next available flight, Buffalo claimed to have no money and was incarcerated. He is currently in the custody of Lebanese military intelligence (G-2). He claims to have been a frequent visitor to Lebanon over the past two and a half years.

13. (S) SGT Buffalo demonstrated astonishingly bad judgment in coming to Lebanon without prior clearance and in carrying military equipment. This case is potentially far more serious than simply the question of someone ignoring the rules and perhaps falling into harm's way. With the airport penetrated by Hizballah and pro-Syrian elements, SGT Buffalo's luggage has no doubt raised suspicions already. His case will be exploited by the pro-Syrians against us and

against the government of Prime Minister Fouad Siniora. Far more innocent examples have been intentionally exaggerated by the pro-Syrian media here in ways that are politically quite damaging for us and for the pro-independence Lebanese. The always suspicious Lebanese are simply not going to believe that someone whose title on his business card reads "Director of Special Operations" merely wandered into Lebanon with such equipment to see a fiancée. Pro-Syrian conspiracy theorists will pick the right moment -- for them -- to leak this, but we are certain that they will, at a time most beneficial for them, spin quite a story. As the Lebanese have confiscated SGT Buffalo's equipment, it can easily be displayed as "evidence" of whatever story is concocted.

14. (S) The timing of SGT Buffalo's travel compounds the problem. The Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) are engaged in an unprecedented and fierce fight against Fatah al-Islam Sunni extremists in the Nahr al-Barid camp. The top civilian and political leaders of Lebanon have demanded repeatedly that we avoid any actions that could be potentially portrayed as indicating direct U.S. involvement in this battle. The pro-Syrians, uncomfortable with the positive implications that a LAF victory would have for Lebanon, have tried to brand the Nahr al-Barid fight as a U.S. proxy war, allegedly designed to impose a U.S.-Zionist mandate over Lebanon. The same pro-Syrians brand Prime Minister Siniora as nothing more than a U.S. agent. Ridiculous as these allegations sound, SGT Buffalo's unauthorized arrival, with his gear, can easily be held up as corroborating evidence.

15. (S) SGT Buffalo has undermined the care with which we have managed Embassy travel and U.S. military assistance to the LAF over the past month of LAF-FAI fighting. We are not

BEIRUT 00000899 002 OF 002

exaggerating when we say that propaganda based on his trip could start unraveling the popular support behind the LAF action against Fatah al-Islam, weaken the army's resolve to press the battle forward, and contribute to efforts to undermine the credibility and legitimacy of a government we support. There is even the possibility that -- just as the pro-Syrians have tried to accuse Saad Hariri and other March 14 Sunni political figures of initially supporting Fatah al-Islam -- we could somehow be linked to FAI, since the equipment confiscated from SGT Buffalo mirrors equipment confiscated from Fatah al-Islam.

16. (SBU) We find it unlikely that SGT Buffalo was unaware that there might be guidance regarding travel to Lebanon. He is a GS-15 accustomed to working in high-threat environments. His rank and experience would have acquainted him with the need for appropriate clearances for travel. By monitoring the media for stories of his arrival here, we will work to minimize the inevitable political fall-out. But we urge all agencies to use this case to remind their employees of the rules regarding the personal travel of any USG employee, civilian or military, or their families or members of households, to partially unaccompanied posts. Perhaps the Department might consider issuing via the Executive Secretary a notice to all agencies in Washington of the guidance regarding travel to partially unaccompanied posts.
FELTMAN